

Library of Michigan Quality Services Audit Checklist History, Getting Started, and FAQ

History and Philosophy of the Quality Services Audit Checklist

First Meeting

In December 2001, State Librarian Christie Pearson Brandau invited a committee of 22 librarians and trustees to discuss the establishment of quality measures for Michigan's public libraries. The committee, to be known as the Quality Services Advisory Committee (QSAC), included representatives from almost all of the library cooperatives and each class size library.

In February 2002, the committee met for the first time at the Library of Michigan in Lansing. They'd been prepared by three inches of reading material, including quality measures developed by other states, theoretical articles on quality measures, and futuristic ideas for improving customer services. Their job was to create a framework for the development of quality measures in Michigan.

QSAC members agreed on six compelling reasons for statewide quality measures:

- They will give us credibility;
- They will give us a shared vision for library service;
- They will give us an educational tool for library staff and boards, government officials such as township supervisors and county commissioners, and the general public;
- They will display achievements with our current funding;
- They will provide a base and explanation for increased funding; and,
- They will inspire us to improve service throughout the state.

Given this background, QSAC members divided library services into six categories, Human Resources, Governance, Services and Collection Development, Technology, Facilities and Equipment, and Public Relations. Volunteers served on subcommittees representing each category. These six subcommittees developed the specific quality measures in their particular area.

QSAC members asked the subcommittees to use six guidelines in developing their measures. They should be customer-focused, easy-to-understand, measurable, incentive-driven, results-based, and not so burdensome that they crush good intentions.

The committee divided the measures into three levels, Essential, Enhanced, and Excellent. This solved the issue of creating measures that would motivate all size and types of libraries, from the smallest and least-funded, to the largest and wealthiest.

Essential Services are the basics of all library service. They are relatively low-cost standards that every library can and should achieve. They are helpful to libraries starting out, and a review for those that are established. As the Alabama Library Association describes them, "Priority standards are those which should be achieved first because of their fundamental importance."

Enhanced Services are more of a stretch to achieve. They may require more funding, and start where Essential Services leave off.

Excellent Services call for the highest level of service obtainable. They are a stretch for any library and require funding and commitment to superb service at every level.

The role of the standards envisioned by QSAC is indicated by this quote from Bob Raz, director, Grand Rapids Public Library, "Through these standards, librarians and trustees will understand the need for quality service and know the realistic costs. They will be able to articulate their needs to garner the support to provide the quality services the public deserves . . . and they will not be afraid."

Subcommittees Form

Having established a framework on which to hang the improvement process, the call went out for volunteers to bring the committee's suggestions alive. More than 50 librarians and trustees responded, with every cooperative represented. They submitted more than 400 measures in the six categories! Some common themes and directions emerged:

- Some measures should be core, or mandatory;
- Some measures can be optional, or elective; and,
- All should work in tandem with a long-range planning process.

Within each level of service, Essential, Enhanced, and Excellent, there are two types of measures. One is core, or mandatory. These measures are considered basic quality library service, and must be realized before that level of service can be considered achieved. For example, setting by-laws for a library board is a core measure.

A second type of measure is elective, or optional. Here a library is free to choose among several options. For example, placing a diaper-changing table in your restroom is a good quality measure, but is not considered a core service.

Quality Measures Endorsed

In the fall of 2002 the measures were edited down to 102 core measures and 28 elective. After a final review by QSAC in December, they were sent to the Library of Michigan Board of Trustees where they were "enthusiastically endorsed" at their January 10, 2003 meeting.

In 2003, a volunteer band of 30 library directors tested the Essential measures in their libraries. Upon completion, the measures were again edited to reflect their experiences.

In 2004, an online process for completing the Quality Measures Audit Checklist was developed and libraries across the state began submitting their libraries for certification.

In 2007, committees reviewed and revised the standards for the Enhanced measures and the Excellent measures. The revisions were implemented in August of 2007.

As a Public Library Director, How Do I Get Started with Quality Measures?

As noted in the section above, applying quality measures fits beautifully into a planning process. If you are thinking about a long-range planning process for your library, working piece by piece through the quality measures is an excellent way to start. It will give you a good sense of your strong and weak areas, highlighting places to focus development and seek additional funds.

Depending on your library size, form a committee. For a large library, this could include representatives from several departments and/or branches. For a small library, the committee could just be you, a board member, and the part-time volunteer. What is important is that together, after reviewing the QSAC materials, you slowly work your way through the measures. For now, just start with Essential. You may find you are already achieving more than you realized, or, on the other hand, are lacking in a particular area. Even if you can check off all the items listed, the group discussion cannot help but spark improved communications and service in your library.

There is an abundance of great library literature to help you achieve any goal. A wonderful bibliography for helpful texts can be found in the Wisconsin Public Library Standards, 4th edition, at <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/standard.html>.

Remember:

- * Work through each level of service one at a time;
- * Recognize that completing each level may take several years; and,
- * Try to combine level achievement with the library's planning process.

Contact Karren Reish at HAL-QSAC@michigan.gov or 517-241-0021 for consultation by email, telephone or in person. Your questions and concerns will help improve the measures.

QSAC FAQ

Are the quality measures linked to state aid?

Quality measures are not tied to current levels of state aid. However, they are useful as a tool to demonstrate the levels of funding needed to bring Michigan's public libraries into compliance with the three levels of library service. When the Michigan library community achieves higher levels of state funding in Michigan, an accounting implementation may become necessary.

If the quality measures are not linked to state aid, why should a library use them?

Quality measures can be used now to educate staff, trustees, local authorities, and state legislators. They can show your community what you have achieved with your current funding, and what could be possible if that funding was increased. The measures can be used as part of strategic planning, as examples of where and how your library can grow and improve. They are an advocacy tool for every library, regardless of size or funding level.

What do libraries receive for achieving Essential, Enhanced, or Excellent levels of service?

When a library achieves any of the three levels, they receive a letter and certificate from the Library of Michigan and their state representative and senator will be sent a letter detailing their achievement. Sample press releases will accompany the award. The certificates for Essential, Enhanced, and Excellent service will be valid for at least three years.

Does a library have to achieve every single measure at each level?

No. There are a certain number of core measures that must be achieved. There are also elective measures from which a library chooses one or two. This system will allow for local variance and choice, while still maintaining certain benchmarks necessary for Essential, Enhanced, and Excellent service levels.

Do you have to be rich to achieve an Excellent certificate?

Not necessarily. Some technology measures are costly to implement, but QSAC encourages libraries to use them as a means for leveraging increased local funding. Some of the measures may best be achieved at the library cooperative level. A few of the measures, such as hours open, are based on class size, but most apply to all size libraries.

How will libraries start using the measures? Can we get any help from the Library of Michigan?

Questions, concerns, comments? Contact Karren Reish at HAL-QSAC@michigan.gov or 517-241-0021 for consultation by email, telephone or in person. Your questions and concerns will help improve the measures.